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Doping prevention: Exploring coaches' experiences and opinions of their role

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1. Introduction

Notwithstanding the many positive roles coaches play in the development of athletes, they have been highlighted as potential agents in doping behaviour. This was recently demonstrated when athletics coach Alexander Yefimov received a four year ban from the Belarusian Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) following Gold medallist Nadzeya Ostapchuk's failed drugs test at the London 2012 Olympics.

Although such instances of coach involvement in doping have been reported, research shows that most coaches acknowledge that they have an important role to play in *preventing* doping (Figved, 1991; Fjeldheim, 1992; Fung and Yuan, 2006; Laure, Thouvenin & Lecerf, 2001). Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research in this area. In addition, the research that exists is limited to coaching populations in Norway, Hong Kong and France.

Therefore, this study aimed to explore UK-based coaches' perceived roles in doping prevention. To provide context to the coaches' perceived roles, the coaches' experiences of being approached by their athletes/players to discuss/provide information on doping-related topics were explored.

2. Methodology

Participants

- 28 UK-based coaches, representing 15 sports
- Coaches aged 19-65+ (Mean age = 33.41 years)
- Representation from various coaching domains (i.e. Children's coach, Participation coach of adolescents/adults, Performance Development coach and High Performance coach)

A cross-sectional online survey design was adopted. Coaches were asked...

- how often their athletes/players approach them to discuss/for information about doping-related topics,
- which topics are discussed when this happens,
- the reasons that they believe they are and are not approached, and
- if they have a role in doping prevention.

3. Results

EXPERIENCES

Almost half of the coaches ($n=12$) had never been approached by their athletes to discuss doping-related topics.

OPINIONS

Yet, the majority ($n=24$) of coaches felt that they had a lead or supporting role in encouraging an *anti-doping* viewpoint..

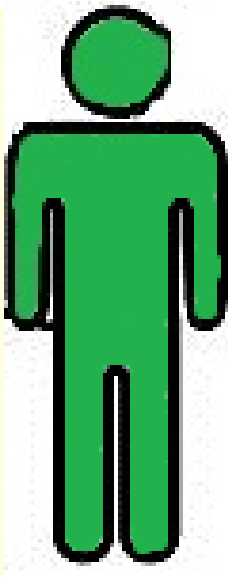
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Coaches working in the performance development domain were approached more often than those in participation domains.

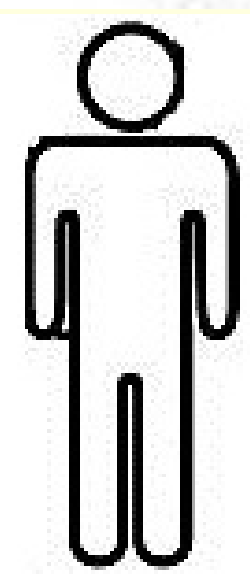
TOPICS DISCUSSED

- Topics most commonly discussed were...
- Nutritional supplements ($n=15/16$)
 - Prohibited substances/methods ($n=14/16$).

Key:



Approached



Never approached

REASONS APPROACHED

- Coaches think that athletes might approach them because they...
- value their coaches opinions
 - believe their coaches are knowledgeable.

OR NOT...

- The reasons that coaches think that athletes might not approach them were more varied...
- gain support from elsewhere
 - doping is a taboo topic
 - aware of anti-doping viewpoint.

4. Conclusion

- When approached, there was a diverse exchange between the coach and athletes regarding the use of licit and illicit means of performance enhancement.
- Although coaches within the performance development domain were most commonly approached, coaches from other domains and coaches who had never been approached acknowledged that they have a role in doping prevention.
- While almost all coaches accepted that they have a role in doping prevention, some coaches were not approached to discuss these matters and were not sure why this was the case.
- Further research might explore coaches' role expectations, including how anti-doping matters impact their every-day practice.
- This research study forms part of a wider research effort by the authors to identify ways in which anti-doping education may be tailored to meet the needs of coaches.

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